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ABSTRACT

An inservice program was developed for elementary school teachers who requested help because of their students' apparent lack of written language abilities. Preliminary planning, involving the teachers (trainees) working with a trainer, determined a way in which student learning needs could be related to teacher training needs. The inservice program was built on the concept that pupils can be the original source for determining the content of training. The program involved the development of a writing curriculum by the trainees, with encouragement and help from the trainer, based upon their actual teaching. Trainees also worked directly with students in developing the curriculum. As a result of the important process of trial and error, the teachers had a product which they were able to use after the program was completed. Even more important, they had learned a process which they could generalize to every area of teaching and curriculum development. The trainees developed an attitude which recognized that they were not the only teachers involved in the process, but that their students were helping them to learn as well. (JD)

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ABSTRACT

"Internalization of Inservice Training"

Successful inservice education is difficult to achieve. The goal of any successful inservice activity is trainee internalization of the theory and the consequential practices for professional application which results in usable product, be it process or product.

This article advances some notions as to the methodology of achieving teacher internalization of theory and practice toward product development.

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INTERNALIZATION OF INSERVICE TRAINING

Introduction

When a recent inservice training activity held for a primary school faculty was completed, pre and post student assessment data was analyzed to determine if the instructional intervention developed by one of the writers produced student behavior change. Statistically significant differences were found, with the results across fourteen classrooms, grades one through three, reflecting a .0005 level of confidence on a t-test statistic. The variance noted suggested that the intervention was significant cause for the students' improved performance. What follows is a discussion by the writers of some notions about the factors involved in producing such exceptional training results.

Teachers as Independent Learners

A major purpose of inservice training is to provide skills which lead teachers to grow professionally even after the training has ceased. The failure of many teachers to carry on after the inservice training has ended is, unfortunately, normal. (Frieberg and Townsend, 1978, 122 and Kennamer and Hall, 1978, 21-28) When training is completed, the trainees usually revert to practicing previous methods as if there had been no attempt to change their behavior. They too often fail to become independent learners; and it is this independence, this continuing to grow after the inservice has ended, which the authors believe to be paramount.

Use Good Teaching Practices for Teacher Inservice

Inservice training can work. There is a rather obvious solution to the problem. The solution is that we need to start where the learner is,

to accept that as the starting point, and to build from there toward independent learning.

Trainers need to activate training by getting the inservice trainee active as a learner. For example, in the training program referred to previously, the trainees used a criterion-referenced assessment instrument rather than a norm-referenced test. The assessment tool used was developed based on criteria established by the teachers. One reason for using the teacher-made assessment tool was to allow teachers to participate proactively from the beginning in determining the goals they wished to achieve. The criterion-referenced technique helps teachers recognize step-by-step progress of their students. They charted these steps while in the process of developing the technique. Another reason for developing their own assessment was that to use a more highly technical method would have consumed more training time and been detrimental to trainee motivation. Just as important as the training time issue were these important activities which demanded trainee time and attention:

--Utilization of trainee basal knowledge of student assessment procedure and methodology.

--Development of teacher-made test to reinforce the notion with teachers that they were teaching toward specific objectives.

--Conceptualization of an assessment strategy that would assist teachers in modifying their instructional behavior.

As a result, trainees quickly felt confident that their understanding of the assessment content and methodology was sufficient to begin the project. At the same time, they also felt that they had the knowledge and skills to modify their assessment process/content if events demanded modification. Thus, the learning process had become relevant and interesting.

Trainees need to see a valuable outcome as a result of the learning process. Trainers need to be interested in the process of training but the trainees need to be interested in a valuable product that will help make teaching easier or life in the classroom happier. The trainees must have success, especially in the beginning, and at the same time learn to accept mistakes and even to learn from mistakes. Most importantly, trainees need to be well grounded in process methods, learned from the program, which need to be internalized in order to be used after the program has ended.

One of the most valuable methods to be internalized is the process of learning from a child. Trainers and trainees alike need to learn how to make use of the child as the original source for determining the content of the training. This determination provides direction for continued professional growth because the children are a constant source of information to the teacher. By internalizing this directional process, the trainees will continue their growth even after the training has ended because student stimulation will always be there.

From Theory to Practice, Process to Product

In order to achieve these aims, training should meld practical and theoretical concerns. Because of trainee distrust of anything that smacks of theory, the trainer must take great care to provide practice in operationalizing whatever theoretical approach that is guiding the content and methodology of the training.

The theory is essential to the development of independent learning, but it must always be related to the actual practice which can be defined as the product of training: that which can be immediately used and can be depended upon to be effective over time. The trainees' primary interests will lie mainly in product.

The trainer should be more interested in process to achieve the useful product. However, one need not exclude the other; both process and product can work together to resolve the problem. Product, process, theory and practice interweave in fostering independence in inservice trainees. These are some of the factors related to good teaching practices.

A Case Study of a Successful Inservice

By basing a recent inservice program within the context of good teaching practices, the writers have seen emerge one of the most successful inservice activities of our careers. A training request came from a rural elementary school faculty concerned over the apparent lack of language development of their students. The teachers were exploring ways in which they might intervene in what, for them, was a critical need of their students. The trainers took two major steps before meeting with the entire staff.

Needs Assessment

1. A pre-planning/development session was held with the staff responsible for inservice and the resource person (trainer) to:
   - A. Do initial exploration of possible training contents/strategies which would:
     - (1) View the context of the training request based on the characteristics of teachers and student populations.
     - (2) Set in the trainer's mind the broadness of the teacher request and the need for reaching more specifically the trainee learning needs.
   - B. Set the structure of the trainer's first contact with the building faculty.

2. An initial meeting between the trainer and the building faculty was then held to:
   A. Specify the actual training needs and prioritize them by teacher needs.
   B. Develop an initial assessment prccedure to determine student learning needs as related to teacher training needs.

Collaborative Inservice Design

At the first meeting, trainees discussed their needs with the trainer. The trainer listened to their concerns, assessed their needs, and developed with the teachers a series of meetings to deal with the issues. The trainer returned for a second meeting with a specific plan directly related to those needs. The teachers wanted help in developing written language abilities of their students. The trainer suggested the development of a curriculum, a specially designed curriculum which would be developed through working directly with the students in that school. This curriculum would be developed by the trainees based upon their actual teaching. Trial and error was to be the important process; the curriculum would be the product. As a result of the process, the teachers would have a product which they would be able to use after the program was completed. They would, even more critically, learn a process which they could generalize to every area of teaching and/or curriculum development.

Demonstration Teaching by Trainer

The trainer, at each meeting, suggested specific methods for teaching. In addition, the trainer also demonstrated these teaching suggestions. The trainer taught a small group of children (2 or 3) from a class in one session and thus developed ideas which were then used to teach their entire

class the following weeks. The trainer emphasized that all class teaching sessions were based on what had been learned through trial and error in teaching the smaller group. At these sessions involving the entire class, each teacher in the inservice program was relieved from teaching and observed the lessons. These lessons then served as the basis for discussion in the inservice program. During the week, teachers tried out, with their classes, the ideas presented. This involved adapting the ideas. Specific lessons were discussed in the inservice sessions with the idea of applying the specifics to each grade level. This, of course, involved moving away from the specifics themselves, generalizing, understanding the theory behind the lessons so that they could be applied to other classes at different grade levels. This was one of the chief ways that theory and practices developed together. The lesson may have been given to a third grade class but the first grade teacher needed to apply the ideas to her own class.

Resulting Curriculum for Writing, Grades 1 - 3

The curriculum itself evolved as teachers applied the ideas. They gave lessons, then formalized the sequence of steps for that lesson, and also provided examples of actual children's work (writing). Each section of the curriculum involved a teacher's aim or objective, the steps taken by the teacher and examples of the results: samples of the children's writings. This process of observing lessons, applying through generalizing the theory in inservice sessions, experimenting through teaching, and finally, adding their part to the curriculum seemed to be a major approach which helped theory and practice mesh together at every step. Every step was evaluated to determine efficacy for the curriculum.

The teachers saw their curriculum develop and they knew it was a credible product. Certainly they would use it after the program for they had ownership and had used it effectively. They had worked as a team and

their curriculum had their real combined efforts in it. At every step of the way, the end result, the hope of a usable curriculum, the product, energized the process.

Important Aspects of the Training Process

Two extremely important aspects of the process need to be explained: the trainer's role and attitude. First, the trainer showed acceptance of teacher expertise. The curriculum was not the trainer's product but the trainees. The trainer accepted what the trainees had to offer with the idea that acceptance leads to further production. If the trainees feel accepted, they will produce more, and they did. In the beginning, they were reluctant, afraid to make mistakes. As the trainer displayed acceptance and encouraged production through teacher trial and error, the trainees became less inhibited. They were willing to try out techniques new to them. They were more willing to discuss what happened when they tried. Sometimes they admitted that they had felt that they had failed in a particular effort. The trainer's attitude was positive even then, suggesting that they had not failed but had learned one way how not to teach that aspect of the curriculum. Because even failure was a lesson learned, trainees were then anxious to try again. They usually found success at their second attempts.

The trainer was willing to model the approaches. And the trainer was willing to discuss some less than positive results from these demonstrations. After all, these were real situations with real children and the trainees were willing to offer suggestions to the trainer. An attitude developed in which all involved recognized that they were not the only teachers, but that their students were helping them to learn. This is an important point because it results in teachers continuing to learn after inservice has ended. Thes trainees learned that their real teachers were their students. After the

program there would no longer be a need for the trainer. The trainer had shown these teachers that they would be able to continue to learn because the most important "trainer" was the child who succeeded. Perhaps the best "trainer" was the child who did not succeed immediately. This child forced the teachers to develop another way, an alternative method, and to learn a new approach. These children taught their teachers more than the trainer could ever teach.

Secondly, the knowledge and past training of the trainees were used. The trainer operated with an attitude that the teachers knew best their learners and that they possessed professional competence which needed only extension, not learning from zero-base knowledge. That the trainer was obviously sincere in this attitude and that the teachers would sense this attitude made the work a co-learning effort rather than the giving of wisdom from an Olympian height.

Summary

The result of such a training format is very encouraging. The teachers did have their product, their own curriculum. However, more importantly, more subtly, the teachers had the process of curriculum development which is now internalized. The curriculum was placed in a looseleaf folder and each teacher was given a copy. In the future, they will continue to modify that curriculum, using student-based data. They will continue to develop additions and modifications through trial and error. That looseleaf folder will snap open and new pages will be inserted for many years to come as teachers continuously learn from their real trainers, their own students.

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